



NEWS from



Congressman

Sanford Bishop

2nd Congressional District, Georgia

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CONGRESSMAN BISHOP COSPONSORS SCHOOL PRAYER AMENDMENT

A constitutional amendment to lift restrictions against voluntary, nondenominational prayer in public schools was introduced in the U.S. House Thursday with the backing of U.S. Representative Sanford Bishop and more than 100 other original cosponsors.

"It makes no sense to protect pornography and ban prayer," Georgia's Second District Congressman said. "The purpose of this amendment is to restore the religious freedom I believe the framers of the Constitution intended by protecting voluntary religious expression in public settings, including student-initiated prayer in public schools."

He said the measure, entitled the "Religious Freedom Amendment," would protect Georgia's moment-of-silence law and other state statutes which give students an opportunity, if they choose, to pray or reflect on spiritual values. Although the Georgia law has been upheld in a federal appeals court, he pointed out that it is expected to be challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Representative Bishop said the proposed amendment prohibits discrimination against any religious beliefs and makes it clear that no student could be compelled to join in a religious activity at school.

Hearings on the amendment are expected to be held by the House Judiciary Committee this summer, and proponents are planning for the proposition to reach the floor in September or October. A constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds vote of both the House and Senate, and ratification by three-fourths of the nation's 50 states.

The Congressman said a number of recent court rulings have further infringed on religious freedom, including those allowing a teacher to fail a student for choosing a religious topic for a

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report; prohibiting Christmas and Hanukkah symbols in public property; and prohibiting prayer at graduation ceremonies.

The amendment says: "The people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage or traditions on public property, including schools, shall not be infringed." It defines the purpose "to secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience." It also says the government shall not require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, initiate or designate school prayers, or discriminate against any religion.

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